

Bill 361 PH 3/12/14

To the Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

I am writing to express my support of Raised Bill 361, a hearing for which is scheduled for March 12, 2014. Family impact statements will provide critical information for judges at sentencing hearings about the impact of incarceration on the families of offenders.

For the past 15 years, I have been a member of the Board of Directors of Families in Crisis (FIC), a non-profit providing services to offenders and their families. Programs and services are focused on preserving family relationships which are critical to enhancing the success of inmates in successfully reentering the community and reducing recidivism.

I can talk personally about my experiences over the years as a FIC board member in observing FIC's counseling sessions for mothers at Niantic, young fathers at Manson Youth Facility (sadly no longer in existence), and children of prisoners and their caregivers. Most individuals coming through Connecticut's criminal justice system are young and are parents. Many are non-violent offenders. The persistent theme among inmates was that they had often experienced abuse as children or the absence of a parent (often due to incarceration) and that their overwhelming wish was to do better with their own children. Children of offenders are the silent victims of crime. One does not only just punish the offender, but his or her family.

I urge you to support an initiative that brings to the forefront the "collateral damage" done to families when we incarcerate parents. This does not mean that incarceration may not be appropriate for some offenders. But, if we can selectively make better decisions about who should be incarcerated and how long, we can better keep families intact, help offenders financially support their families, potentially reduce the intergenerational cycle of crime, and potentially save the state money by reducing the number of prison beds and offering alternatives to incarceration. This makes good business sense for Connecticut.

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